Boron to Buttonwillow

Muscle, Media, and American Identity on Highway 58

*Running Time:	78 min.	Image/Footage:	Color and Black & White
*Audio:	Stereo	Aspect *Ratio*:	1:77/16:9
*Acquisition Format:	HD-1920x1080	Contact:	john@tft.ucla.edu
*Screener:	Secure Online File (QT.mov @ "Proxy"LoRes/or H.264)		
*Festival Format:	2K, DCP-1 (secure screener URL available on request)		
*Producer/Director:	John Thornton Caldwell		
*Co-Prod/Historian:	Thekla Ellen Joiner, PhD.		
*Status:	Just finished, with World, No. American & U.S. premieres available		

Agora Telefilm | 10491 Colina Way | Los Angeles, CA 90077 | USA

***Logline**: This film-archaeology-road-movie excavates memory and the media produced along a single, remote 129-mile highway in rural California; where aging workers from small towns provide striking contrasts and odd parallels with Hollywood's tortured films shot on the same hardscrabble landscape.

***Synopsis**: This film-archaeology-road-movie traces the cultural landscape of a single 129-mile remote highway that cuts across one of the most contested landscapes in rural California. Caldwell re-photographs locations of the 1930s FSA photographers (Lange and Taylor), re-films locations used habitually by Hollywood (Zanuck, Ford, Flaherty, Hitchcock, Soderbergh, Anderson, Ridley Scott), and dredges up a wealth of promotional videos (corporate, military, and union films) made along this 'missing' leg of the 1930s Oakie migration route. A roadway that is somehow both nondescript and historically and cinematically significant. Oral histories with aging residents from small towns provide striking contrasts and odd parallels with Hollywood's tortured onscreen mediascape. An iconography of white, masculine, alienation—from Hollywood outsiders for over a century—barely covers the nagging labor, racial, public health, and environmental problems facing the communities on the ground. A collective rural imaginary still haunts the remote locations featured as case studies here: the desert mining town of Boron, the scorched-earth military utopia of Mojave, the migrant farm town of Weedpatch, and the slowly-dying Buttonwillow, CA.

(1) J.Ford & H.Fonda analyze footage from Grapes of Wrath

(2) Ruins along Highway 58 near Cesar Chavez retreat, Keene, CA]

***Festival/Distribution Status**: This film is follow-up to Caldwell's "*Rancho California (por favor)*" (world premiere in Sundance Film Festival 'New Frontier' section in 2002). U.S. & world premieres available for *'Boron to Buttonwillow'*. All theatrical/non-theatrical markets available.

***Director's Statement**: *"For a century, Hollywood and Television have filmed muscular stories along Highway 58—about gender, race, and class. About what it means to be a man or a woman in the American "pecking-order." This Film tells the story of the ways that "outsiders" invent and imagine the rural world. Sometimes these images align with the locals. But at other times these films feel…more like science fiction…like something from another planet. What about this land convinces producers to turn its towns into plot points, and its people into stock characters? Is it the remoteness, the geology, the weather and wind, the arid life forms? Or is it the bared ruins of industry, left behind, once it abandons the region and its workers?"*

"For answers, I dug up every film and media representation I could examine that depicted life and land alongside Highway 58. What stories would these media artifacts tell us, once dusted off? With orphaned films, VHS tapes, and archival maps to guide me, I traveled mile-by-mile through a series of small towns. From the start of Highway 58—in Mojave's high-desert—on Kern County's eastern border. To its endpoint—in the oil-rich Carrizo Plains—on Kern's western border. 129 miles of well-worn blacktop and concrete. Dissecting a striking landscape, through a single county as rich and contested as any in the United States." --John Thornton Caldwell (Producer/Director/Writer)

(3) Apocalyptic Stunt Car along Highway 58; (4) Oaxacan migrants posing for photo with Lange's iconic 'Migrant Mother' (2013)

***Episodes/Reels** (*Sequence of Episodes* that follow Highway 58 from East-to-West):

Boron to Buttonwillow-1 (Fall 2016): Muscle, Media & American Identity

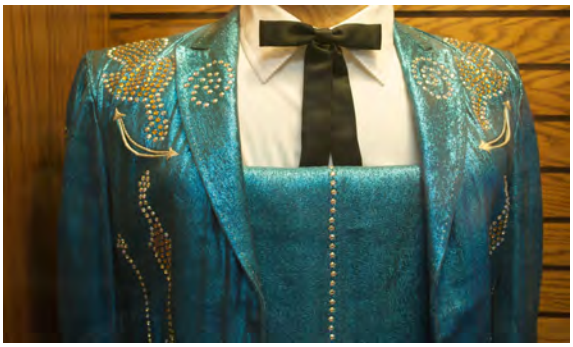
1-Boron. (23min). Desert mining town that claims Reagan's series *Death Valley Days* even as it hosts then renacts *Erin Brokovich's* civic push-back over resources during recent Kern County re-branding.
2-Rio Tinto, PLC vs. ILWU. (22min). High-desert labor war with online social media insurgency. Aus/ UK conglomerate locks-out miners who stalk CEO and disrupt RT's new age corporate 'transparency'.
3-Edwards, Rosamond, Mojave, CA (23min). A scorched-earth military-industrial utopia; stage for cinema's white, heroic, alienation, in town that combines biblical prophecy with new age space travel
4-Tehachapi, Keene. (7min) From town with alpine fantasies and a state prison (a film location scout's ideal) to the pre-promised-land retreat for the Joads, Cesar Chavez, and Pres. Barack Obama.

(note: film ends with 3m trailer/preview for the following 2017 Sequel:)

Boron to Buttonwillow-2 (Sequel/Fall 2017): Machines Don't Get Pregnant

5-Weedpatch, to Bakersfield. Lange, Steinbeck & Hollywood unions' farmworker heroes crushed by DiGiorio Farms… To city known for both 'Bakersfield sound' and as 'the killingest county in the US'.
6-Shafter, Delano, Famosa, CA. (8min). Rural stage for Hitchcock, Ridley Scott, and Disney also serves as recurring cinematic "ground-zero" for male, working-class criminality in film and literature.

7-Buttonwillow. (28m) 'Jim Crow California.' Slowly dying racially segregated town where residents picked cotton by hand until 1970. Episode documents re-birth of exiled, activist 'South Central Farms'
8-McKittrick, Taft. (8min) Stressed landscape is: source for apocalyptic nightmare of *'There Will Be Blood';* stage for punishing bad women *Thelma & Louise*; & site for aquifer-destroyed fracking-waste.



(5) Abandoned rocket test pad along Highway 58; *(6) Area gained reputation of 'Bakersfield Sound' in Country Music*

***Biography** (Producer/Director): John Thornton Caldwell, an author and filmmaker (MFA Cal Arts, PhD Northwestern), is Professor of Film, Television & Digital Media at UCLA. Beyond producing documentary and experimental films/videos, Caldwell has published numerous chapters and articles, and 5 books, including: *"Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television"* (Duke University Press, 2008), *"Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries,"* (Routledge, 2009, co-edited), *"Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television"* (Rutgers University Press, 1995), *"Electronic Media and Technoculture"* (Rutgers University Press, 2000), and *"New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality"* (co-edited, Routledge, 2003). Caldwell's feature documentaries include *"Rancho California (por favor)"* (Sundance premiere, New Frontier Section, 2002), *"Freak Street to Goa: Immigrants on the Rajpath"* (1989, Chicago Film Festival, Margaret Mead Film Festival 1988), and *"Boron to Buttonwillow" (*forthcoming, Dec 2016). Caldwell's projects have been exhibited and screened widely and broadcast on public television (WTTW, WGBH, WNED, SBS-Australia). His awards include: German Bauhaus IKKM Senior Fellow (2012), Annenberg Senior Scholar, University of Pennsylvannia (2012), UCLA Distinguished Teaching Award (2010), CSULB Distinguished Faculty Award (1992), UC-Institute for Research in the Arts Fellowship (2001-02), State Arts Council Grants (1983, 1988), AFI/NEA Regional Fellowships (1985, 1999) & National Endowment for Arts Fellowships (1979, 1985).

(7) Demonstrator protesting Rio Tinto during Boron Lockout *(8) handmade sign celebrating Highway 58*

BACKSTORY (Regional and Media Historical Contexts for the Film *"BORON TO BUTTONWILLOW")*

*****North American Historical Context***

- The FSA/Farm Security Administration (photographer Dorothea Lange, sociologist Paul Taylor)
- John Steinbeck, author of the novel *"Grapes of Wrath"*
- The film *"Grapes of Wrath,"* 20th Century Fox, John Ford, Director, Daryl Zanuck, Studio Head (1940)
- Cesar Chavez and UFW movement 're-boot' farmworker media and organizing in 1960s.

*****Hollywood Films Shot-on-Location (or 'Placed') in/or around Highway 58/466 region***:

- *Erin Brockovich (*Universal 2000), *Death Valley Days* (Filmaster/US Borax 1952-1970), *The Carpetbaggers* (Embassy/Paramount 1964*), Toward the Unknown* (Toluca/Warner Bros. 1956), *The Right Stuff* (Ladd Co./Warner Bros. 1983), *Die Hard 2: Die Harder* (20th c. Fox 1990), *Waterworld* (Universal 1995), *Armageddon* (Touchstone 1998), *S.W.A.T.* (Columbia 1998), *Transformers* (Dreamworks/Paramount 2007), *Terminal Velocity* (Hollywood Pictures/Interscope 1994*), Star Trek: Generations* (Paramount 1994), *Grapes of Wrath* (20th c. Fox 1940), *Faster* (CBS Films/Tristar 2010), *Thelma and Louise* (Pathe/MGM 1991*),* Psycho (Shamley/Paramount 1960), *North by Northwest* (MGM 1959), *McFarland* (Disney 2015), *Five Easy Pieces* (Raybert/Columbia 1970), *There Will Be Blood* (Miramax/Paramount 2007).

*****Industrial Films and Promotional Videos Produced in/around Highway 58/466 region:***

- "Last Haul of the 20 Mule Teams" (Chevrolet, truck advertisement filmed in Boron, 1930s)
- "Boraxo Cleaning Products" (Commercial Advertisements, US Borax, 1960s).
- "The Mine of the Future" (Corporate promotional video, 2012ff)
- "Communities of Practice" (Corporate promotional video, 2010ff)
- "Gettier Security: Replacement Workforces" (Corp surveillance services video, 2010)
- "ILWU Boron Lockout, YouTube Videos" (Online videos, various, 2010).
- "MUA: Rio Tinto as Frightening, Familiar 'Avatar,' (online video, 2010, 2011).
- "Live Webcast: Rio Tinto Stockholders' Meeting, London" (streaming video, 2010).
- "Into the Unknown" (U.S. Airforce, History of Edwards).
- "Rocket-Town USA" (Hearst Newsreel, 1950s)
- "Test Aircraft Crash Footage, Edwards AFB" (1950s-1960s)
- "Tall-Man: The Boom" (U.S. Airforce, 'Educational Film' on Sonic Booms, 1960).
- "Presidential Address ('The Military-Industrial-Complex'; Pres. Eisenhower's Final Speech to Nation, 1961)
- "F-35 Aircraft Promotional Video" (Lockheed/Martin, 2016)
- "Mojave Air and Space Port" (Video Press Kits, 2008 & 2013)
- "Virgin Galactic Space Travel" (EPKs and Promotional Videos, 2010—2016)
- "NTSB—Crash Footage & Televised News Conference on Virgin Galactic Crash" (2014)
- "President Barack Obama Dedicates Chavez Memorial, Keene, CA (Office of President, 2013)
- "Hearst Newsreel Footage of California Lettuce Strike" (1934)
- "The Plow that Broke the Plains," (Pare Lorenz, Paul Strand, et. al. 1936)
- "The Land" (USDA Government Documentary by Robert Flaherty/Pare Lorenz, 1940)
- "Roosevelt Banters" (Re-edited U.S. Newsreels by German Nazi Propaganda Ministry, 1943).
- "Trailers, Previews, and Newsreels promoting 'Grapes of Wrath' (Fox Studios, 1939, 1940).
- "Poverty in the Valley of Plenty" (Hollywood Unions, AFL, Paramount TV, 1947).
- "The Digiorgio Story" (DiGiorgio Farms counter-propaganda film, used to discredit unions, 1947ff).
- "Why Braceros?" (California Growers Association, 1959).
- "Harvest of Shame" (California section on Braceros and white farmworkers, CBS, 1960).
- "Music videos/films of Buck Owens/Merle Haggard (promoting 'Bakersfield Sound,' 2014).
- "By the Numbers" (Kern County/Board of Trade promotional films, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2016).
- "The Story of Oil" (Sinclair Petroleum "Educational film", 1912).
- "DVD Extras: 'There Will Be Blood'" (Miramax/2007)
- "Energy Nation" (Promotional/Lobbying film from Western States Petroleum Assoc., 2015).
- "Fracking in Kern County" (Online activist video by Center for Poverty & Environment, 2015)
- "Movies Filmed in Kern County" (clip reel, Kern Board of Trade Film Commission, 2010)